Tenth Meeting of the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources

THE GREAT KRILL DEBATE

One of the most important issues this year at the CCAMLR meeting is the subject of a catch limit on the krill fishery.

In July this year, the Krill Working Group discussed the krill fishery in the Southern Ocean. The Scientific Committee had requested that they provide their best estimate of a precautionary limit for krill in the various FAO statistical sub-areas of the Southern Ocean using the best available information. The Working Group came up with a precautionary yield of 1.5 million tonnes for area 48. ECO welcomes the working group's initial efforts.

By the working group's own account, the knowledge of krill upon which their estimate of yield is based is extremely limited. ECO understands that the Scientific Committee's debate centred around whether the biological information is sufficient to set a yield based on such information. Some countries are very uncomfortable about setting a TAC at least three times as high as current catches, when the information is poor.

Scientists are being forced into making these premature recommendations because the fishing nations will not accept limits on their fishing without "scientific evidence" of what those limits should be. They seem to equate lack of such evidence with no risk to the ecosystem.

The statement of a Japanese scientist at the Krill Working Group meeting epitomises the problem with this debate, and with CCAMLR. He said that Japan is "concerned that placing precautionary limits on the krill fishery would be premature ... because [inter alia] there should not be unnecessary limitations on countries making rational use of renewable marine resources."

Japan and the Soviet Union seem to have the notion that ensuring the protection of the ecosystem requires a catch that is at least three times as high as current catches, when the information is poor.

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tem is somehow unnecessary or irrational. This means that they have vetoed any attempt within CCAMLR so far to introduce any sort of precautionary management for krill. The fact that they are prepared to keep fishing until harm is contrary to the spirit and intent of the Protocol to the Antarctic Treaty on Environmental Protection, which was negotiated and signed by all of the CCAMLR fishing nations.

The Antarctic environment will not be adequately protected until (among other things) the exploitation of living resources is managed by precautionary principles. Japan and the Soviet Union will be failing the spirit of the Protocol if they continue to block such an approach in CCAMLR.

In ECO's view, the best solution would be to agree to a TAC in Area 48 that MUST be accompanied by controls on a very fine scale which protect the foraging ranges of predators. Furthermore, it should be broken into sub-areas so that the whole TAC can't be taken from any one sub-area. In addition, the final TAC must take into account the difference between the reported catch and the actual kill. The difference comes both from the conversion factors between the actual weight caught in the net and that reported, and from the krill that is killed by the net but not actually brought on board.

ECO awaits the outcome of the great krill debate with interest - can the Commission take a precautionary approach to management or will the krill have to wait another year or ten?

The US has once again failed to consult the Scientific Committee or its working groups on the development of a crab fishery in Area 48. ECO considers, though, that the documentation on the proposal is a vast improvement on last year verbal's announcement. The research and data collection plan seems to be well thought out and comprehensive, although ECO leaves substantive comment to people far more expert in crustacean matters.

However, ECO is concerned that only lip service has been paid to last year's agreement to notify the Commission in advance of any new fishery. The US instead went ahead and issued another permit, only telling the Commission about it after the fact.

ECO is concerned that this proposal might be touted as a model of how a new fishery should be handled.

Despite the concern expressed last year about this fishery, and the discussion about new and developing fisheries, both permits that have been issued so far have been presented by the US to CCAMLR as a fait accompli.

ECO believes that assessments should be done by the Scientific Committee and its working groups prior to fishing. Surely, the whole point of discussing new and developing fisheries is to give the experts in these fora a chance to assess any proposals for new fisheries. This is so that there is an opportunity for the Commission to create any management measures that might be necessary to ensure that Article II of the Convention is not breached.

It is only fortunate that neither of the permits have been taken up, and that there is time for interested people to comment before yet another permit is issued. The important point that delegates must remember is that the process that was followed in this case is a poor model for the future.
A DOSE OF REALITY

Last week, Greenpeace representatives distributed copies of a report by an ex-Soviet (now Estonian) fisheries inspector, Oleg Senetsky. The paper contained strong criticisms of Soviet fishing practices in the Southern Ocean that he had witnessed during fishery inspection tours in the late 1980's. You will probably be aware that this release got substantial media attention, particularly in Australia.

ECO, on behalf of Greenpeace, would like to make the authenticity of this paper absolutely clear. Greenpeace received the paper via an Australian friend of Mr. Senetsky two months ago. Mr Senetsky wrote the paper himself, in English, and the version that was distributed to delegates and the press has only a few minor grammatical and spelling changes. The original is available from Greenpeace representatives.

ECO is confident that this report is authentic, as Mr Senetsky’s name is listed in the CCAMLR Inspector’s Manual 1989/90.

Many of Mr. Senetsky’s observations are similar to those found by Greenpeace in the Southern Ocean. As many delegates have said informally to ECO, the information comes as no surprise to any one who has worked with the fishing industry virtually anywhere in the world.

Greenpeace released this information to highlight the poor record of the Soviet Union in reporting data to the Commission and the reality of fishing.

ECO urges the Commission to look at the allegations of the Soviet fisheries inspector seriously. The credibility of the CCAMLR Commission will be questioned if these allegations are glossed over or ignored.

The only way to improve this poor record is to implement a comprehensive system of independent observation on board fishing vessels, and to start taking the reality of fishing behaviour into account when discussing management of Southern Ocean fisheries.

NO OBSERVERS, NO FISHING

ECO applauds the development of a system of observation. Given that Article 24 of the Convention required the development of an observation system, ECO says, “It’s about time!” After ten years, CCAMLR has finally got to first base.

Since the inception of CCAMLR there has been an appalling lack of data forthcoming from commercial fisheries. ECO sees the implementation of this system as the first step towards obtaining much needed independent information on the finfish and krill fisheries. Without detailed information on catch and effort, the biological characteristics of the catch and on incidental mortality associated with the fishing operations, the Scientific Committee will continue to be hamstrung in making recommendations to the Commission.

The observation system, however, is at risk due to the costs that are proposed to be carried by the observing country. ECO believes that the cost of observation should be borne by fishing nations. These nations benefit from the exploitation of marine resources, whereas non-fishing nations do not. This would be consistent with the OECD call for user-pays environmental management. This is already occurring in other parts of the world - for example, observers on foreign vessels in New Zealand and Australia are paid for by the fishing nations.
FISHING FOR SEABIRDS

Will the Commission this year move to prevent the thousands of sea birds killed in longline and trawling operations each year??

Conclusive evidence is available world-wide to show that longlining operations catch seabirds. Evidence of bird kills north of the CCAMLR area near Australia and New Zealand have been reported.

Detailed observations by Greenpeace on Soviet longliners around Shag Rocks and South Georgia, and similar reports by French scientists around Kerguelen, have confirmed that a range of bird species are killed in longline operations. The evidence strongly indicates that without drastic measures, populations of albatrosses around South Georgia will continue to decline.

In addition, the Greenpeace report clearly showed that some Soviet fishing vessels were ignoring the Commission’s recommendations from last year, which were to set longlines at night and to ensure that baits should sink immediately as they land in the water.

ECO CALLS ON THE COMMISSION TO CLOSE THE DISSOSTICHUS FISHERY FOR THE COMING YEAR. Only this will prevent long term damage to albatross populations while research is carried out to see what methods can be used to prevent seabird mortality.

BAN NET MONITOR CABLES

This year the archaic net monitor cables still used on Soviet trawlers have been confirmed as causing high seabird mortality. In New Zealand, during the 1989/90 fishing year, over 2000 sea-birds were killed including large numbers of white capped albatrosses.

Except on Soviet vessels, net sonde cables have been replaced in the last 10 years with acoustic devices linking the vessel and the net. These new devices cost in the order of only $US14,000 and are available from a number of companies world-wide. What’s more, the cost of these devices can soon pay for themselves, as they improve fishing accuracy.

ECO CALLS ON THE COMMISSION TO BAN NET MONITOR CABLES FROM THE START OF THE NEXT FISHING YEAR!

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ECO-TIPS

ECO applauds the Secretariat for now copying documents double-sided. A further step would be the use of 100% recycled, non-bleached paper that has not been de-inked. This ECO is proudly printed on such paper. Save energy, save trees.

When ordering seafood in restaurants, remember stock collapses in Australian fisheries, such as those for southern shark, Bass Strait scallop, orange roughy, and gemfish, and refrain from ordering these species. For farmed seafood, pick species harvested from inland fish farms. In Australia, coastal fish farmers, for example on the Atlantic salmon fish farms, have sometimes illegally killed seals that take fish.

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